THE ETERNAL PURSUIT OF UNHAPPINESS

BEING VERY GOOD IS NO GOOD,
YOU HAVE TO BE VERY, VERY, VERY,
VERY, VERY GOOD.

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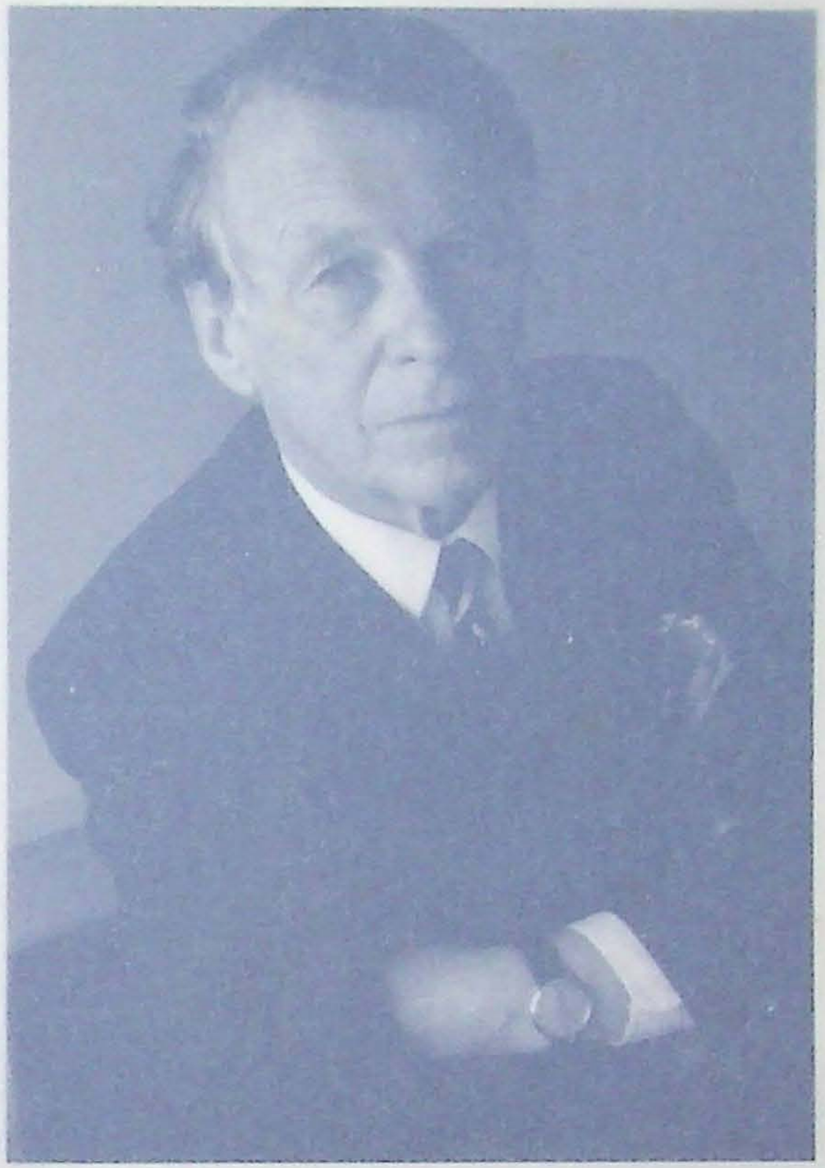
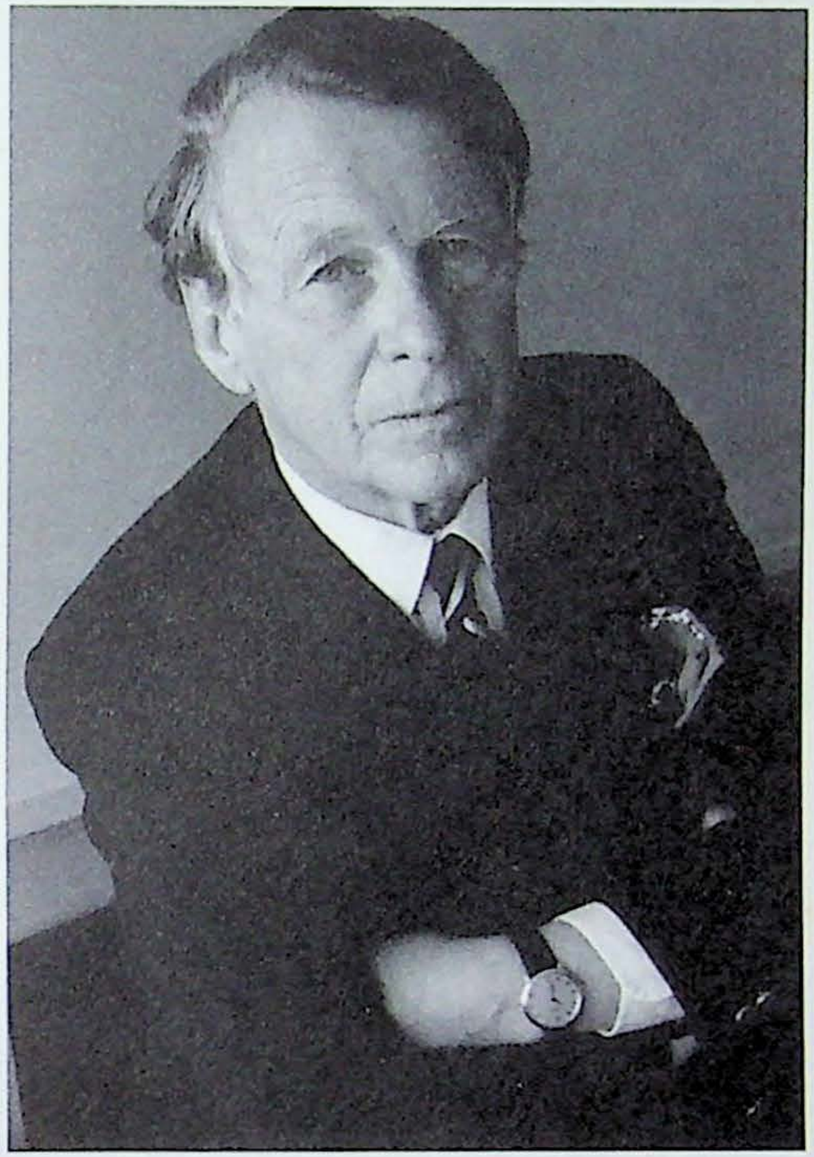


DAVID OGILVY

1911 - 1999



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OGILVY & MATHER
WORLDWIDE
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We have a habit of divine discontent with our performance.
It is an antidote to smugness.
D.O

INTRODUCTION

This book is about philosophy.

It is about ethos, beliefs, and all those tweed jackety things which gentlemen with monocles love yapping on about.

If it's any consolation, though, this book is also about sex.

As it is written primarily to address a rather awkward question:

Can a 2 billion dollar gorilla like Ogilvy ever be svelte, sultry and sexy?

The Ogilvy agency of the fifties and sixties was far hotter than WK, CPB, BBH, AMVBBDO and the rest of the alphabet combined.

The question is, can we still be gorgeous now that we're several hundred kilos heavier?

The answer to our dilemma can be summed up in two pithy words:

'DIVINE DISCONTENT.'

Decades before advertising prophets were preaching 'Good enough ain't good enough,' Ogilvy was already practising it.

But what did David actually mean by *divine discontent*?

Here's an interpretation:

DON'T BOW YOUR HEAD.
DON'T KNOW YOUR PLACE.
DEFY THE GODS.
DON'T SIT BACK.
DON'T GIVE IN.
DON'T GIVE UP.
DON'T WIN SILVERS.
DON'T BE SO EASILY HAPPY
WITH YOURSELF.
DON'T BE SPINELESS.
DON'T BE GUTLESS.
DON'T BE TOADIES.
DON'T BE GOLLUM.
DON'T GO GENTLE INTO THAT
GOOD NIGHT.

AND DON'T *EVER*, *EVER* ALLOW
A SINGLE SCRAP OF RUBBISH OUT
OF THE AGENCY.

This handbook will tell us how to make David's *divine discontent* a habit by the daily practice of the following creative habits:

THE 8 HABITS OF HIGHLY CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

COURAGE

IDEALISM

CURIOSITY

PLAYFULNESS

CANDOUR

INTUITION

FREE-SPIRITEDNESS

PERSISTENCE

To the ancient Greeks, a good habit was called a virtue, while a bad habit was known as a vice.

(Vice)

FEAR

EXPEDIENCE

THE STATUS QUO

BORING

TYRANNY OF POLITENESS

COLD ARITHMETIC

BUREAUCRACY

GIVING IN

Each of the eight habits, as you can see, has a corresponding evil twin. While we work at adopting the eight creative virtues, we have to work equally hard to replace the old patterns of self-defeating behaviours.

An old Latin proverb tells us how: a nail is driven out by a nail, habit is overcome by habit.

(Virtue)

COURAGE

IDEALISM

CURIOSITY

PLAYFULNESS

CANDOUR

INTUITION

FREE-SPIRITEDNESS

PERSISTENCE

It's important to note that the eight habits are totally agnostic. They are required in *all our disciplines* and are, by no means, proprietary to Advertising. In that sense, the eight habits belong to the whole church.

(Habit 1)

COURAGE

There's no shortage of brains in the industry. It's the vertebral column that tends to be missing.

Fear is a demon that devours the soul of an agency: it diminishes the quality of our imagination, it dulls our appetite for adventure, it sucks away our youth.

Fear leads to self-doubt, which is the worst enemy of creativity.

If fear is our principal adversary, then, courage is our chief ally. It is the first of the eight creative habits for good reason: it is the habit that guarantees all the others.

In the absence of courage, nothing worthwhile can be accomplished.

That's because anything on *the cutting edge* needs to be constantly fought for and defended.

Ideas are magical but fragile seeds that require protecting.

If we are to fight, if we are to defend, and if we are to protect; we clearly need a spine.

Only with a spine will we stop double guessing and express an opinion.

Only with strength of character will we ever say an honest 'no' instead of always offering up an obsequious 'yes.'

And only by standing up for what we believe in will we begin to build the most precious commodity in the world:

Trust.

Then, the virtuous circle begins: courage leads to trust leads to courage leads to trust and upwards and onwards we go.

(Habit 2)

IDEALISM

We are the people we have been waiting for.
NAVAJO MEDICINE MAN

Helen Keller, the deaf and blind activist, was asked by a journalist what she thought would be worse than being born blind. She replied without missing a beat, 'to have sight and no vision.'

When our dreams are little we become little people: our aspiration becomes meeting next quarter's target and not losing an account.

When we focus our life solely on making a buck, it shows a poverty of ambition.

Here's D.O's take on the subject:

'Raise your sights! Blaze new trails!
Compete with the immortals!'

How great we become depends on the size of our dreams. Let's dream *humongous* dreams, put on our overalls, go out there and build them.

And remember, the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones who do.

(Habit 3)

CURIOSITY

An endless trail of ideas floats in the ether.
You will only see them if you are curious.

Not only is the universe queerer than we imagine: it is queerer than we can imagine.

And what do most of us do in this dazzling Aladdin's cave?

We close our eyes.

'He who no longer pauses to wonder and stand rapt in awe,' Einstein pronounced, 'is as good as dead; his eyes are closed.'

It is only in the *open* state of curiosity that we can explore, dream and make babies in our heads.

For a start, we have to ask stupid questions like a pesky 6-year-old.

Once again, Einstein has something to say on the matter (as well as proving that he would have made a very short-lived cat):

'I am neither especially clever nor especially gifted,' the physicist said. 'I am only very, very curious.'

When we've lost the capacity to see the world and everything in it as *new*: unreasonable, bewildering and something that gives rise to astonishment, we have become dim-sighted and stooped with age.

Ray Kroc summed it up nicely when he said, 'When we're green we grow, when we're ripe we rot.'

(Habit 4)

PLAYFULNESS

We are all born children.
The trick is to remain one.
PABLO PICASSO

David *never* entirely grew up.

He would heckle in meetings, throw chocolate cakes at dinner parties and roll down grassy slopes in Brook Brothers suits.

The man loved a good joke, especially one with some 'wind' in it.

He told us to develop our eccentricities while we're young so people would not think we were going gaga as we got older.

Like all creative people, David knew that necessity may be the mother of invention, but it is horseplay that's most certainly the father.

All our art, all our science and all our philosophy have been invented by playful people, *not* serious people.

'Serious people,' Leonardo da Vinci said, 'are too past orientated to ever invent new things.'

To unleash the pattern-recognising, meaning-making, conceptual left-brain, David encouraged us to distract the censorial right-brain every now and again with half a bottle of claret, a trip to the cinema or by going to work in pyjamas.

Here's a story from the sixties.

The Los Angeles Times had asked David how he felt about people going to work in jeans and tennis shoes when the norm of the day was suit and tie for men, and dress or suit for the ladies.

This is what David told the paper:

'I don't care if people come to work in their pyjamas as long as they get the work out.

'Sure enough, the day after the article appeared, my entire department showed up in pyjamas. It was great fun. The office rocked with laughter…

'Make it fun to work at your agency. Kill grimness with laughter. Encourage exuberance. Get rid of sad dogs who spread gloom.

'When people aren't having any fun, they don't produce good advertising.'

(Habit 5)

CANDOUR

Only dead fish go with the flow.
MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE

We are a company of problem solvers.

Our job requires us to be brutally honest and *totally* dedicated to the truth.

For unless we know the truth, in all its unlovely details, how are we to go about the business of problem solving?

The tendency to be nice and avoid telling the truth is so omnipresent in human beings that it can properly be considered a characteristic of human nature.

Which is why, David warned us about the tyranny of politeness and how we can be too agreeable for our own good.

David wanted us to do the unnatural until the unnatural becomes itself second nature.

If we avoid candour in order to curry favour with other people, we actually destroy trust.

If someone asks us for our opinion and we don't offer it; our answer is not only dishonest, it's worthless!

We only get a spark when the stone and flint are moving in *opposite* directions.

(Habit 6)

INTUITION

The creative director thought it was funny.
The managing director thought it was funny.
The chairman thought it was funny.
The tea lady thought it was funny.
The client thought it was funny.
The client's wife thought it was funny.
The client's butcher thought it was funny.

Okay now, let's research it to see if it's funny.

To understand the miracle of the unconscious, take a piece of paper and draw a large circle on it.

Then at the circumference of the circle, draw a little niche.

The tiny area inside the niche, psychiatrists tell us, represents our conscious mind.

The rest of the circle, 95 per cent or greater of the power of our brain, is our unconscious.

Dreams, premonitions, gut feelings and 'Freudian slips' are all attempts by our unconscious to guide us.

We are wiser than we think and intuition is the art of listening to the guru within us.

All our finest thoughts and best ideas are not the work of the logical mind, but gifts from the unconscious.

Yet, in a world dominated by quarterly reports and numbers, it's logic that gets all the airtime.

This is illogical.

We waste our beautiful mind by leaning lopsidedly on logic.

We are in the business of creativity and discovery. What clients value most about us is our ability to find one-of-a-kind solutions for their business problems through intuitive leaps.

Most often but not always, the people with this talent are to be found in our creative department. Although, ideally, the *whole* company should be a department of creative ferment.

Here's what David Ogilvy had to say about these oddballs:

Managing an advertising agency isn't all beer and skittles. After fourteen years of it, I have come to the conclusion that the top man has one principal responsibility: to provide an atmosphere in which creative mavericks can do useful work.

In the advertising industry, to be successful you must, of necessity, accumulate a group of creative people. This probably means a fairly high percentage of high-strung, brilliant, eccentric nonconformists.

Some of the mammoth agencies are now being managed by second-generation caretakers who have floated to the top of their organisations because they were smooth contact men. But courtiers cannot create potent campaigns. Our business needs massive transfusions of talent. And talent, I believe, is most likely to be found among nonconformists, dissenters, and rebels.
D.O

It's the cracked ones, in other words, that let light into the world.

(Habit 7)

FREE-SPIRITEDNESS

Rule 1. There are no rules.
Rule 2. Never forget rule one.

The creative process can broadly be divided into three stages.

The first stage is for the mind to gather its raw materials.

Stage two is the mental digestion of the raw materials.

The third and final phase is to get down on your knees and pray that the ideas will come.

The business of producing ideas, you see, is both tedious and terrifying.

The first two stages are horrible chores that we are forever trying to dodge, while the last stage is white-knuckled anxiety and waiting for the unconscious to pull the rabbit out of the hat.

David voiced the secret fear of all creative people when he said, 'I have never sat down to write an advertisement without thinking: *this time I am going to fail.*'

Ironically, most agencies fail to grasp the fragility of the idea-generation process.

The notion that bureaucratic sausage factories pumping out fodder for meetings will solve the problem is ludicrous, as are the box-ticking, paint-by-numbers follow-up sessions.

The work is, not infrequently, as dull as the meetings that precede it.

Bureaucracy has *no place* in an ideas company.

The paradox is that, very often, more is accomplished over a bottle of Pinot Noir than an international gang bang.

Step inside a free-spirited, idea-centric company and you'll notice that the air itself is different.

David called it atmosphere.

It's permission to practise magic: it's licence to be the best at what you are best at.

The temper of the place is omnipotent, and mood is everything.

Little wonder, David made the management of these intangibles the principal responsibility of the top man.

Inside a company with atmosphere, the people are not servants of the system.

They are *alchemists*.

What else is left to do but trust (there's that word again) the people we work with and set them free?

So they, in turn, can learn to relax and trust that the muse will show up on time with the merchandise.

(Habit 8)

PERSISTENCE

HOW A PROBLEM SOLVER GOES TO WORK:
Dead ends, cabin fevers, blind spots, zigzags, U-turns, roundabouts and loop-the-loops are all part of the creative process. You see, those who live by their wits go to work on roller coasters. The ride is exhilarating, to be sure, but one has to have a stomach of titanium. For starters, you're never a hundred per cent certain you'll ever get there. It's like being in a taxi driven by Ray Charles. If you (even) get to your destination, you sometimes wonder why you've ever bothered. Other times, the cosmic cab lets you off and the scenery pleasantly surprises you. It's small wonder some creative folks' best pal and buddy is a good ol' Southern boy by the...

name of Jack Daniel; others run six clicks every day, still others become Buddhists; the rest of us, though, consult therapists. Self-doubt comes with the territory. And ignorance, believe it or not, is an asset. Experience and knowledge makes us sensible, predictable and dull. But if you don't know you know, you think you don't know, then, you're ideally poised for a leap across a chasm. *Docta Ignorantia*. You open your eyes wide. And you shut them again to see. You suck it and see. You do not assume; you look, you look, you look, you look, you look, you look, you look, you look, you look, and, then, you look, you look, you look, you look, you look, you look, you look again. You look at your fingernails. You look at the tree line. You look at the clouds. You stand on your hands, so you can look differently. You squint your eyes and look. You look in the closet. You look at the ceiling. You look in libraries. You look in a magazine. You look at old advertising annuals. You look at children's books. You look at the Bible. You look in cinemas. You look in art galleries. You look

at people. You look at the edge of your desk. You look at your watch. You look in the mirror. You look for ghosts and invisible things. You look for Plato's perfect forms. You look at your dreams. You look for patterns. You look for the tiniest similarities. You look for microscopic differences. You look under every stone. You look under every green tree. You look to heaven. You look for bloody anything. After all, discovery consists of seeing what everyone has seen and thinking what nobody has thought. You're not proud. You beg; you borrow; you steal; you build on other people's ideas. Someone was once asked, 'Where do you get your ideas?' He replied, 'I don't. They get me!' So you sit impatiently waiting for the muse to visit. You drum your fingers. You go for a walk in the park. You tend the garden. You wait because a thought comes when it wills, not when you will. You become superstitious. You wear your lucky idea underpants. You stare to the left to tap into your right brain. You walk to a nearby wall. You bang your head against it. Hmmm, it seemed to work the last time...

Never give in. Never give in. Never give in. Never. Never. Never. Never.

If the client kills your ad, do him a better one.

If he kills that better one, do him an even better one.

If he kills that even better one, do him your *damn* best one.

God, the Quran tells us, is with those who persevere.

Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

Before them obstacles vanish into thin air and mountains crumble into atoms.

Dogged determination is often the only trait that separates a moderately creative person from a highly creative one.

That's because great work is never done by temperamental geniuses, but by obstinate donkey-men.

CONCLUSION

So you see, the eight habits are really David Ogilvy's big ideal broken into practical bite-sized pieces.

They are predicated on the principle that it's impossible to improve our reputation before we improve ourselves, and meaningless to put our personality (however sparkling) ahead of our character.

We are what we *repeatedly* do.

Our character, personal or corporate, is basically a composite of our habits.

Because habits are consistent, often unconscious patterns, they constantly, daily, express who we really are.

If Ogilvy is to be gorgeous, wonderful, brilliant, fabulous, magical, beautiful, big and sexy; we must first be brave, idealistic, curious, playful, candid, intuitive, free-spirited and persistent.

Only if we are eternally unhappy with compromise.

Only if we leave no room for excuses.

Only when we show appropriate disdain for expedience and absolute respect for the work.

Only when all of us resolve to relentlessly practice the eight habits, on every job bag, on every project and on every campaign, will we begin to prove that we are not Goliath, but a company of Davids.

NEVER THE END

The writers and art directors of this handbook have laboured uncomfortably under the mantle of Divine Discontent and know that you will not only understand our discomfort in having to stop working before it was completed, without blemish, but that you will endeavour, with everything you have, to make it better than we have been able to make it. That is the way of Divine Discontent.

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THE CORPORATE CULTURE OF OGILVY & MATHER

AS SET DOWN BY
DAVID OGILVY

WHAT WE BELIEVE AND HOW WE BEHAVE

Some of our people spend their entire working lives in Ogilvy & Mather. We try to make it a stimulating and happy experience. We put this first, believing that superior service to our clients depends on the high morale of our men and women.

We help them make the best of their talents. We invest an awful lot of time and money in training—perhaps more than any of our competitors.

We treat our people as human beings. We help them when they are in trouble—with their jobs, with illness, with emotional problems, with drugs or alcohol.

GENTLE MANNERS, HARD WORK

We are opposed to management by *intimidation*. We abhor ruthlessness. We like people with gentle manners. We see no conflict between adherence to high professional standards in our work and human kindness in our dealings with each other.

We don't like rigid pecking orders. We give our executives an extraordinary degree of independence, in the belief that freedom stimulates initiative. We dislike issuing orders; the best results are produced by men and women who don't have to be told what to do.

We like people who are honest. Honest in argument, honest with clients, honest with suppliers, honest with the company—and above all, honest with consumers.

We admire people who speak their minds. At the same time we admire people who listen more than they talk, and make a real effort to understand views that differ from their own. Candor is a virtue; arrogance is not.

We admire people who work hard, who are objective and thorough. Lazy or superficial men and women do not produce superior work.

We are free of prejudice of any kind. The way up the ladder is open to everybody, regardless of religion, race, gender, or sexual preference. We detest nepotism and every other form of favoritism.

There are, however, limits to our tolerance. We have little time for:

- Office politicians
- Bullies
- Paper warriors
- Toadies
- Pompous asses
- Prima donnas

In promoting people at all levels we are influenced as much by their character as anything else.

EARNING THE RESPECT OF CLIENTS

We exist to build the business of our clients. The recommendations we make to them should be the recommendations we would make if we owned their companies, without regard to our own short-term interest. This earns their respect, which is the greatest asset we can have.

What most clients want most from us is great campaigns, with the spark to ignite sales and the staying power to build enduring brands. We put the creative function at the top of our priorities.

The line between pride in our work and neurotic obstinacy is a narrow one. We make our recommendations clear. But we do not begrudge our clients the right to the final say. It is their money.

Many of our clients employ us in several countries. It is important for them to know that they can expect the same standards of behavior in all our offices. That is one reason why we want our culture to be more or less the same everywhere.

We try to sell our clients' products without offending the mores of the countries where we do business.

We try to create an atmosphere in which partnerships with our clients can flourish. We attach importance to discretion—clients don't appreciate agencies which leak their secrets. We do not take credit for our clients' successes. To get between a client and the footlights is bad manners.

We take new business seriously, especially new business from current clients. We have a passion for winning, but we play fair vis-à-vis our competitors.

ANTIDOTE TO SMUGNESS

We have a habit of divine discontent with our performance. It is an antidote to smugness.

We like reports and memos to be well written and easy to read. We also like them to be short—and sent only to those who need to know what's in them.

We are revolted by pseudo-academic jargon like attitudinal, paradigms, demassification, reconceptualize, suboptimal, symbiotic linkage, splinterization, dimensionalization.

We ask our top people in every office to represent our industry in their communities, to grasp the nettle on difficult issues, and to make their voices heard in interviews, articles, and speeches.

We use the word *partner* in referring to each other. This says a mouthful.

NINE OBITER DICTA

Through maddening repetition, some of my obiter dicta have been woven into our culture. Here are nine of them:

1 Ogilvy and Mather—one company indivisible.

2 We sell—or else.

3 You cannot bore people into buying your product; you can only *interest* them in buying it.

4 Raise your sights! Blaze new trails!! Compete with the immortals!!!

5 We prefer the discipline of knowledge to the anarchy of ignorance. We pursue knowledge the way a pig pursues truffles.

6 Never run an advertisement you would not want your own family to see.

7 The consumer is not a moron.

8 Unless your campaign contains a Big Idea, it will pass like a ship in the night.

9 Only First Class business, and that in a First Class way.

www.ogilvy.com
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